

Connecticut General Assembly
Appropriations Subcommittee on Elementary & Secondary Education
Public Hearing
March 3, 2015
Testimony Submitted by Tim Sullivan of Hartford, Connecticut

Thank you, Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Committee for giving me the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Tim Sullivan. I am a resident of Hartford and a parent of an 11th grade student at the Classical Magnet School. Prior to that my son attended the CREC Montessori School in Hartford. I am here today to thank you and your predecessors for having the foresight and wisdom to provide my son and his classmates with a great opportunity. Thanks to your actions my son will be graduating from Classical after having received a first class public education.

As a child growing up in Hartford's Blue Hills neighborhood, I also attended choice schools. I attended the St. Justin's School and then went on to Loomis Chaffee. The difference was that my choices were governed by admission tests and tuitions. These options were not available to my friends from the neighborhood, many of whom would have benefitted from them. They were reserved for the intellectual and economic elite.

The world my son lives in is different. His little league team, the boys he plays ball with at the park and kid down the street all attend schools of choice. Some prefer private schools, but many are opting for the choices provided by various public school options. The main difference is that they are now available to everyone regardless of family income or test taking ability. While his school and Loomis share the same curriculum and goals, the people he attends school with are different. Unlike my friends from Loomis his friends truly reflect a cross section of society. Black, White, Hispanic. Rich and Poor. Urban and Suburban. What they all have in common is an intense desire to use their liberal arts education to pursue a degree from a four year college. Classical provides that environment to everyone.

The fallout from the Sheff case is a complicated series of ripple effects. The neighborhood schools have had to adapt, not everyone gets to attend the school they want initially and it generally costs more money to educate and transport a child. But you need to remember that these changes are an investment in our future. They make our city stronger and more viable going forward.

My wife and I have chosen to stay in Hartford to raise our family. As taxpayers and community organizers we, and thousands more like us, contribute every day to the quality of life in Hartford. We love our city and the existence of magnet schools has allowed us to stay.

After five years of flat funding, the magnet schools are in jeopardy. We cannot sustain the innovations that are so critical to the success, if revenue cannot keep pace with rising expenses. We are not asking for massive infusions of cash, but rather a formula that guarantees gradual increases over time. This is reasonable.

There are thousands of children in our neighborhood who want to attend magnet schools. Your vote during this budget cycle can make those dreams come true, or snuff them out. Give our magnet schools enough to keep pace. Let's not lose the ground we have gained. Fulfill the promise, and keep our city strong.